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# The Prison Journal

## Muslim Pakistani prisoners and their experiences upon release from prison: a political economy approach

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Keywords:	Muslim prisoners, employment, resettlement, family breakdown, prison re-entry
Abstract:	Although plausible at the level of observation and description, much prisoner re-entry literature, seems undertheorized. Therefore, there seems little offering a counter explanation that meets the seemingly commonplace and intractable processes socially integrating those released from prison, and the insuperable challenges faced by those undergoing such experiences. Important as ex-prisoner's own accounts are, they are insufficient without consideration of the social structural constraints placed upon them. The article considers these constraints through the meaning placed by a group of British Muslim men on their experiences upon release from prison.

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## **Muslim Pakistani prisoners and their experiences upon release from prison: a political economy approach**

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Key words: Muslim prisoners, employment, resettlement, family breakdown, reoffending.

### **Introduction: social integration and Muslim ex-prisoners**

Concern about the social integration of ex-prisoners around the world has grown as prisoner numbers have risen (Baldry, et al 2006; Melossi 2015). This growing movement to better prepare offenders about to return to their communities however, reveals that preparation alone cannot ameliorate the challenges that the ex-prisoner experiences upon their release from prison. Adjusting to the world outside prison can be an extremely demanding task for ex-prisoners (Pager, 2003). As documented by a number of prisoner autobiographies, lost time cannot be recaptured (James, 2005). Most prisoners who leave prison nevertheless do so with high hopes for their future (Hartfree, Dearden and Pound 2008). Plans to move into employment, education or training, stay off drugs and out of prison, do not always go as planned as many prisoners find upon their release that life away from prison can be equally, if not more, challenging than the life they experienced in prison. In some cases, prisoner's plans are unrealistic, in others the challenges faced around housing, employment, family support and relationship with partners can cause the ex-prisoner to struggle with life away from the prison and to start questioning whether prison life was indeed more difficult than life away from prison (Hartfree, Dearden and Pound 2008).

These and other observations from the re-entry literature although plausible, seem to us undertheorized. This article in contrast, argues that there continues to be something intractable about socially integrating those released from prison, and insuperable about the challenges faced by those undergoing such experiences. These difficulties go beyond whether ex-prisoners try hard enough or are motivated enough; whether they choose and act in their own best interests; indeed, they go beyond ex-prisoner's own accounts, to the social structural constraints placed upon them, reflected in the well-known inadequacy of the support services offered them.

The organisation of the article is first, to describe and explain the peculiarities of the place that British Pakistanis occupy in the prison system and social structure generally, and how these may be linked through experiences of persistent and concentrated poverty. In other words, how the general social profile of the prison population is disproportionately found among young Pakistani men, without suggesting in a deterministic way that the social conditions experienced by this group makes offending and imprisonment more likely than for other groups. Because of course, these conditions and their criminogenic consequences are mediated and mitigated by an array of interacting risks and motivations, leading to alternative experiences, identities and pathways (Qasim 2018). They are as we will show,

nevertheless penalized in significant ways because of their social and ethnic structural position as low skilled, unqualified, young poor urban Muslim men in Britain.

Next, we provide a critical review of the prisoner re-entry literature noting some strengths and limitations and its relevance applied to our re-entry study described later.

Third, we note some of the economic, social and cultural pressures bearing down on the British Pakistani young men that feature in a long term ethnographic study conducted by one of the authors, showing the criminal opportunities available to them through the operation of local criminal drug markets. We do this with reference to other similarly conducted studies of minority ethnic young men's involvement in criminal drug markets. The focus in this article is upon their experiences leaving prison as they went back and forth between prison and their neighbourhood. In this context we go on to present this particular aspect of the findings of the study and how this led us to consider a political economy approach to understanding the experiences of the men leaving prison and re-entering their neighbourhood.

Moving on to the fourth and main substantive aspect of the article, we explore the experiences that a core group of nine British Muslim men had upon release from prison and the meaning of these experiences for them. This article pays close attention to some of the challenges the men faced from trying to resettle back into their communities, to trying to find work and refraining from post prison offending. The particular themes and issues that repeated themselves in the process of re-entry were family relations, adapting from the prison to neighbourhood environment, seeking employment, having a criminal record, their memories of prison, and back to crime. Overall, the findings suggest that despite the stronger family bonds that appear to exist amongst Muslim families that are said to facilitate reintegration, found in studies of desistance (Calverley 2013), Muslim prisoners like most other prisoners struggle with resettlement, particularly struggling to maintain healthy family relationships, trying to find suitable work and refraining from further offending after release from prison.

The fifth and final part of the article argues that a political economy conceptual theoretical framework is justified, which we suggest flows 'naturally' from the men's experiences and accounts of their difficulties and dilemmas, explaining the opportunities and constraints placed upon them. The framework delineates a political economy approach and contributes to the re-entry literature drawing upon a range of work from this tradition, older (Rusche 1933) and newer (De Giorgi 2006, Wacquant 2009).

### **Muslim prisoners, employment and persistent poverty**

The numbers of Muslims in British prisons has increased substantially in recent years currently standing at 10,300. According to the prison statistics for 2017, over 15 percent of the prison population in England and Wales is Muslim, yet Muslims are only 5 percent of the total population. The proportion of Muslim prisoners has trebled since 1994. The Muslim prison population has doubled in size over the last ten years. This partly reflects the natural growth of the Muslim population and its young profile, and partly the concentration of

criminals among the young and economically disadvantaged, who are disproportionately Muslim. Fifty-nine percent of Muslim prisoners were aged 15-29 compared with 47 percent of all prisoners. It is important to reiterate that the more youthful profile of Muslims and their disproportionate concentration in lower socio-economic groups partly explain the over-representation of Muslims in prison, since criminality is especially associated with the young and with economic deprivation (Allen and Watson 2017, British Religion in Numbers 2010).

The profile of the general prison population is of economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It may be significant therefore that Pakistanis are more economically disadvantaged than any other group in Britain. The Pakistani group has the highest proportion of households, at 45 percent, living in poverty (Barnard 2014). Although they have higher unemployment rates too, the key to the position of the Pakistani group is they tend to be concentrated in the lowest-paying occupations (Brynin and Longhi 2015). Working in low-paying sectors such as catering, retail and transport, in 2011 half of Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers earned less than £7 per hour and found it harder to access training and promotion opportunities (Barnard 2014). Although Pakistanis enter low-paying occupations relatively poorly educated and poorly skilled, they are still the most likely to be overqualified for their job, which means that education does not offer complete protection against low pay. Pakistanis are paid less due to the fact that as employees they have different characteristics and work for different types of firm compared to white employees (Brynin and Longhi 2015). This sense of occupying relatively economically marginalized enclaves apart from the mainstream labour market influenced the isolated employment views and prospects of the Pakistani young men we interviewed.

Brynin and Longhi (2015) confirm that Pakistanis have the highest levels of occupational segregation, which reflect barriers to entry to an occupation, due to lack of information about job options, discouragement and discrimination. Such 'ethnic penalties' in the labour market are not easily explained by differences in education or other individual characteristics. Outside large cosmopolitan cities, these obstacles forces Pakistanis to enter specific occupations as self-employment, yet possibly insecure employment, rather than as employees. Their study concluded that Pakistanis in work are over-represented in either low-skilled occupations, or high-skilled occupations associated with self-employment, which are often used as a way of escaping from unemployment or low-status manual work. An aspect of this for some, as we shall see in our study, is engaging in entrepreneurial criminality.

Consistent with the view that it is the longevity and concentration of poverty experiences rather than poverty per se that makes offending more likely (Webster and Kingston 2014), the existence of persistent poverty is more prevalent among Pakistani and Bangladeshi than any other groups, i.e. those falling into poverty find it difficult to escape (Fisher and Nandi 2015). Using Census data, Catney and Sabater (2015) found that geography mattered for the employment outcomes of Pakistanis. Concentrated pockets of unemployment are particularly notable in parts of northern England for the Pakistani group. Living in such areas has a particularly negative effect on work and poverty rates for Pakistanis. Racism, and the fear of it, restricts access to social networks and can prevent progression at work. It also intimidates people from leaving their own area to look for work or access services.

To reiterate, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, have a higher probability than any other ethnic groups to be paid less than the living wage in all occupational classes being the most poorly paid and in the lowest-paying types of job. Therefore, are the most vulnerable to poverty and are substantially worse off than all other ethnic groups on all measures. Finally, these differences are most extreme for men. We are *not* arguing that these somewhat exceptional economic and social group conditions *directly* lead to Pakistani young men seeking criminal solutions to resolve status frustration and impoverishment. Clearly most do not. It is rather, that these adverse conditions make it more likely that they will seek such solutions through acquisitive and entrepreneurial crime. In other words, we *are* arguing that these are necessary but not sufficient conditions for street crime and involvement in drug markets to occur (Sayer 1993, Pawson 2006).

### **Re-entry: between prison and neighbourhood**

Because like in the United States the prison population in the United Kingdom per capita is one of the highest in the world, this means that at any given time a high rate of individuals are released from British prisons. Returning to society, individuals are largely uneducated, unskilled, often without family support, and with the stigma of a prison record, many suffering serious psychological and social problems after release. Whether their extremely poor employment prospects are a cause or effect of their offending and imprisonment is a moot point. In our view the answer to this question will depend on penal and social policy (Petersilia 2003). The young men in the study reported here were no exception. Regularly extracted from their neighbourhood, imprisoned, and then returned a few years later, this churning between neighbourhood and prison exacts particular sorts of costs not only on the individuals involved but, on their families, and communities. This relatively recent and growing dimension to British Pakistani Muslim community life has been significant in how the community is perceived and perceives itself.

Petersilia's (2003: 221) study of the crisis of prisoner re-entry and reintegration in the United States concluded that the services and personnel in place that are supposed to facilitate these processes 'could not have designed a more ineffective system had we set out to do so.' The situation in Britain is likely little different to that found in the United States and elsewhere (Burke and Collett 2015, Graham 2018). Systems fail to adequately distinguish between those who are truly dangerous and those who are not. In particular, that disproportionate criminal justice resources are 'spent mostly on non-violent, mostly drug offenders, diverting resources and attention away from violent, predatory criminals' (Petersilia 2003: 221).

This lack of discretion and inability to tailor the punishment to the crime is counterproductive at all the levels discussed in our description of the study participant's experiences on leaving prison, and eventually, their returning. If their imprisonment temporarily stopped them offending their return from prison brought all the negative impacts of prison. Apart from making up for lost time, the stigma and harshness with which they are treated by society, neighbourhood and family, increases the likeliness of their

retuning to crime (Petersilia 2003). Discredited ex-prisoners in ever larger numbers accrue experience making it harder for them to ever lead law-abiding lives.

One of the key areas mentioned by our study participants was the way successful reintegration after prison is made possible by ex-prisoner's family relations. Among male prisoners in England and Wales, Brunton-Smith and McCarthy (2017) show how prison visits during a sentence and improved family relations, ex-prisoners were significantly less likely to reoffend whilst also being more likely to find work and desist from class A drug use. The role of strong family support for reintegrating prisoners as they re-enter neighbourhoods isn't as well known, although the specifically Muslim family and neighbourhood *Biraderi* (caste and clan networks) are cited as an important source of support by some (Calverley 2013). Regarding the effects of employment on desistance from crime after release from prison, Altonen's (2016) Finnish study showed that employment plays a limited role in recidivism and desistance processes because few find sustained employment. In any case, labour markets in the United Kingdom have become increasingly difficult for those with low education and limited employment histories, and the devaluing of low-skill manual labour is unlikely to help (Farrall et al 2010). Maruna's (2001) study of desistance in Liverpool, suggests a poor match between repetitive low-waged and low-skill manual labour, and the personal characteristics and aspirations for status found among the men in his study, despite employment retaining its value as a crucial aspect of social integration and wellbeing.

Perhaps of most relevance for the men in our study is Maruna's (2011) argument that ex-prisoner reintegration requires ritual, especially after the drama and boredom of prison institutionalization, that counter the degradation of status experienced in prison. Our research participants appear to experience an absence of ritual in returning to their neighbourhood, despite their putative Muslim religious identities, and it is difficult to see what rituals of reintegration might be conjured from lives of family breakdown, constant police interdictions and violence. After the rituals of punishment there are no public rituals of reintegration into the community left and returned to, leaving ex-prisoners to engage their own private individual efforts alone. Maruna (2011:4) argues that for 're-entry' to be meaningful there must be a symbolism of '*moral inclusion*', by which he means rituals of 'atonement, forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation', as 'intangible processes of status elevation.'

Leverentz (2011) in capturing what impact individual and neighbourhood characteristics have on attitudes toward crime and prisoner re-entry, different communities are shown to have attitudes and experiences with crime and prisoner re-entry that vary in the ways they frame 'the crime problem'. More or less punitive attitudes are shaped by neighbourhood characteristics such as rates of poverty and other social disadvantages, perceptions of neighbourhood stability, ethnic homogeneity and the degree to which criminals and ex-prisoners are concentrated in such neighbourhoods, as well as reflecting general concerns or anxiety about crime and society. For Our research participants, re-entering an explicitly 'moral community' of Muslim religious based rituals, might normally focus attention and emotion, generate solidarity and symbols of group membership, reducing anxiety and fear. We might expect that a context whereby Muslim religious traditions allow the former prisoner to repent and the wider community to forgive is auspicious for reintegration. We expected compassion and a deep concern for redemptive rites of passage might make



conceivable public recognition that an offender has changed and apologises for their crimes and the harm done (Ahmed et al., 2001 Maruna (2011, and Calverley 2013). The accounts reported here suggest not, for a number of reasons. Rituals of prayer, work and marriage are absent from our research participants lives. Rather, they experience 'failed rituals' (Maruna 2011).

In one of the few British studies of desistance to do so, Calverley (2013) explored whether Bangladeshi Muslim communities have distinct and different attitudes to rehabilitation, tolerance of returning prisoners, the role of the family in these processes and the extent to which community members assist in the rehabilitation of ex-offenders. According to Calverley (2013) young offending Bangladeshis men returning to their neighbourhoods after completing a custodial sentence faced the unwelcome burden of their previous reputation. Dealing with the stigma of their past involvement in crime at the level of the neighbourhood and its religious values, Islam presented a potential 'hook for change' which they could draw upon from their immediate neighbourhood and was relatively easy to access. Similar to our research participants, they began their spiritual transformation in prison, in part to cope with the monotony of prison life. Unlike Calverley's Bangladeshi sample however, our research participants were relatively unsuccessful at reconnecting with religious and 'good friends' with whom they had previously lost contact due to their involvement in crime. Social networks of religious friends which served to recognise and legitimise their efforts to change were absent. Unlike the participants in our study, Calverley's Bangladeshis' did not rely upon engagement in the labour market to stop offending, but on the social capital provided by networks of pro-social friends prior to being helped to secure employment.

Seeking parallels or comparisons between Calverley's (2013) study of Bangladeshis desistance and our study, families were crucial in influencing desistance in his study, carrying a strong message of forgiveness and promise of future support. Claiming that the redemptive possibilities of Islamic religion and its forgiveness-orientated culture stands in stark contrast to the retributive approach of criminal justice policy, Calverley's Bangladeshi desisters were helped by families pragmatically counteracting shame and rehabilitating their son's reputations. In contrast to the Pakistani young men in our study, they eventually took up roles and responsibilities of fathers, partners and husbands that were expected of them, and they were rewarded for their efforts. They had rarely relied on employment for their desistance. Rather, they reconstructed a pro-social identity based around their family, who worked with them *collectively* to build a future together. As adults they had also come to appreciate the significance of religion as moral compass.

Given our political economy approach and argument it is worth concluding this brief review by focusing on some examples of re-entry research directly studying the influence of economic marginalization on prisoner re-entry outcomes among minority young men. Verbruggen (2016) found that for young men, a criminal background does not necessarily in itself damage employment prospects when a history of unemployment has already reduced their prospects. He concludes that being convicted or imprisoned damage their employment prospects but no more so than their lack of employment experience, which tends to be a better predictor for future labour market success. Soyer (2014) shows that among minority young male offenders, imprisonment itself – its fundamentally passive and punitive framework – restricts young men's ability to exercise any creative energy in relation to their desired non-offending identity. Consequently, they are unable to develop viable strategies



of action that could sustain desistance after their release. Thompson (2008) asked whether race or ethnicity itself serves as a barrier to re-entry in the United States, emphasising that because rehabilitative efforts are stymied by punitive public attitudes to prisoners and ex-prisoners, legal obstacles prevent those with a criminal conviction from satisfying even basic needs such as housing, healthcare, employment and political participation. For Fader (2013) the complete disconnect between what youths experienced inside reform schools and the settings in which they must put their new skills and achievements into practice contributed to a high rate of failure on the outside. Institutional release required adopting behaviour that would be dangerous or demeaning in a poverty and violence-stricken urban neighbourhood. Survival in a hostile environment trumped everything else.

Fader's (2013) study of incarceration and youth transitions has its counterparts in the experiences of the research participants in our study, who in contrast to their fruitless work seeking experiences, garner greater respect and income from drug dealing than they would from sporadic, low paying legitimate work. Even their parenting responsibilities (most have fathered children outside marriage between spells in prison) reflect their ambivalence about romantic commitments and inability to form stable families, and in any case, their infidelity, lack of resources, unstable employment, criminal records, and ever-present danger of return to prison make their female partners reluctant to depend on them. In Fader's study the few who were successful had strong social bonds, avoided 'street culture' creating law abiding

Identities that overcame myriad obstacles. Rajah et al's (2014) work with adolescent male prisoners in the United States showed that over time their experiences of, and stories about, incarceration and re-entering their neighbourhoods were told through the lens of changing social conditions and economic prospects, which provide the context that shifted their accounts. We will find many of the themes in the literature reviewed in this section both repeated and contradicted in the accounts and experiences of our research participants.

### **The study: young, Muslim and criminal**

The data presented here is drawn from Qasim's (2018) earlier part of our ongoing study of nineteen British-born Pakistani Muslim men aged between 18 and 31 living in Bradford, north England. Based on the lives of older members, this article focuses on a core group of nine who referred to themselves as 'The Boys'. Here, we draw only on the prisoner re-entry aspects of the data from this core group rather than drawing on the larger study.

Data was collected through participant observation and through in-depth interviews with each of the young men. All had been to prison, receiving various length sentences at different times, while for some prison sentences went back several years whilst for others these were more recent. Crimes and convictions also differed, but most had been in prison for selling drugs. The prisons they served their sentences also varied, although for most these prisons were situated in north England. There were some amongst The Boys who had been to prison on more than one occasion. In the course of the study, due to their experiences of prison, a great deal of conversation revolved around this, with The Boys discussing who was inside, where they were, with whom, who was released and reminiscing about their own experiences of being inside.

Having previously outlined the typical social and economic conditions afforded to the ethnic group to which they belonged – notably their isolation and de facto segregation to particular residential places and parts of the labour market – we next explain the sorts of social and economic imperatives faced by drug dealers in everyday life, before going on to look in detail at how these pressures were felt and what they meant to The Boys, as they navigated their re-entry to their neighbourhood after leaving prison.

### **Economic and cultural imperatives among drug dealers released from prison**

Upon release from prison, one of The Boys Zahir, plaintively stated *the* main problem to the researcher, 'There's not a lot for me to do now that I'm out. I'm trying not to get back into hustling but it's harder now. What else can I do to make paper [money]?' This problem is in part about how mainly poorly educated, unskilled young men survive in a cash economy recounted across many studies over many years. For Zahir and The Boys, release from prison meant making up for lost time but how? Prison had disrupted cash-flow and contacts in the local drug market. Sullivan's (1989) Brooklyn study of youth crime in the inner city, decried the emphasis in similar contemporaneous studies on the individual characteristics of young people that ignored social and economic conditions as sources of urban young minority and poor male criminality. While not denying the existence of individual differences, Sullivan found that ignoring group behaviour and influence leads to conclusions that discount the importance of cultural, social and economic processes, particularly as alternative sources of reward through entrepreneurial and economic crime. At the height of the US crime wave, Sullivan (1989) observed how the severe economic marginalisation of young people and young adults in minority neighbourhoods made economic crime more attractive, how unemployment and underemployment induced personal stress and weakened local social controls. Noting against the academic consensus at the time that stressed family resources seemed decisive in influencing young people's transitions, rather than what was fashionably understood as family structure (the presence or absence of the father in the household).

Although underpinned by economic marginalisation, The Boys street values refused the status of victim and did not consider such a position attractive, seeking out instead, more empowering social arenas in which to find status and reward. Sandberg and Pedersen (2009) in another similar study of Black cannabis dealers in Oslo showed how in a welfarist society, making money and garnering economic capital was subordinate to the possession of 'street capital', seen in dealers' and distributors technical and mythological knowledge of illegal drugs and dealing. The immense appeal of 'symbolic capital' in contradistinction to conventional forms of cultural capital, education and status, meant that individuals in street cultures have more exciting and rewarding lives than individuals in conventional society. Similarly, Bucerius' (2014) study of Muslim drug dealers in Germany – like those in our study area – could only hope for low paying jobs in the formal economy or slightly better-paying jobs in the informal economy. The limitations placed on immigrant young men's participation in the labour market, drive some young men to seize the many and more lucrative opportunities available to them in illegitimate and criminal markets in goods and services. The promise of fast money and local status made the drug market a tempting

alternative to the formal economy, and this had little to do with staying in school and gaining qualifications. Again, the drug market provided them not only with financial resources but also with a way to gain self-respect, and leadership roles.

### **Muslim Pakistani prisoners and their experiences upon release from prison**

One of the first areas of concern in speaking to and observing The Boys were the challenges they faced adapting to the outside world after release from prison. Upon release, some of them spoke of the difficulties they experienced adapting to the change in environments. This is illustrated by the story of Salman who, at the conclusion of his sentence, spoke of how the following morning he was unable to leave his bedroom until a family member came and allowed him out. Although this sounds comical, in reality it indicates that The Boys, as well as so many ex-prisoners, had great difficulty adjusting back to the outside world. Time spent in jail is time of de-individualisation and the institutionalisation of the personality. The longer the sentence and the more frequent the imprisonments, the greater the difficulties some of The Boys had in adjusting to civilian life. At the same time, there is a tacit recognition between them that they all need support, ranging from money to moral support, at this time.

Prison also impacted on the breakdown of family relationships amongst some of the young men as, upon release from prison, they found it increasingly difficult to get on with their family members, particularly after having served a long stretch. This was certainly the case with Kamran who was not getting on well with his siblings after release from prison. Kamran felt that his younger siblings were not showing him the respect that he deserved as an older brother, and this, as he explained was the cause of most of the arguments that he was now having with his parents:

'They [parents] always taking me younger brother's side. I know why though, its cuz he gives them money and I don't. He's a fucking prick though, he thinks he's all clever getting brave in front of them, but you should see him when he's on his own, he don't say two words. But then in front of them, he starts getting all funny. I told him the other day to pass me the remote, asked him about 10 times and he ignored me so I just lamped him [punched him].'

Kamran later explained how his parents had on several occasions called the police after he attacked his younger brother. All of these arguments meant that Kamran began spending a lot of his time away from the family home, either cruising in his car along with his friends or spending time at his girlfriend's house. He had struggled adjusting to the outside world when previously released from prison. According to his friend Nav, this was because he was familiar with prison and he found it difficult to cope with the pressures on the outside. As Nav explained, '...he prefers prison. He doesn't like it on the out, he feels lost and that out here.' Although it was clear over the time the researcher has spent with Kamran that he did not intend to return to prison, his reckless behaviour at times, pointed to this possibility. He

had, in total, spent seven years of his life in prison, and one could argue that his familiarity with, and conditioning by, prison life, lessened any fear it had for him. It was apparent that maintaining relationships with family in ways a shrewder judgement would counsel, eluded him. Kamran struggled with the fact that whilst he had been to prison, his younger siblings had grown up and matured and that they were no longer children who he could boss around, they wanted to be shown respect just like Kamran had expected of them.

Salman was another of the young men who felt that his relationship with his family was no longer the same as it was before he went to prison. Salman explained how his family were unable to understand his needs, he felt they were unable to understand that he wanted to enjoy his life before settling down and getting married in an arranged marriage. Whilst Salman felt that they cared for him, he felt that they were unsure of how to best support him upon release from prison instead of persuading him to get married.

‘when I came out of prison, me family all sat me down after about 3 days, they could see I was chilling and that and coming home late, they thought I'd go and do the same shit before going into prison so my parents were like it's time for you to settle down now and get married to one of my cousins, I was like no fucking way, I ain't ready for that shit yet, I want to enjoy myself before settling down, they didn't like that, me family stopped talking to me for a few days but then they were alright with me after a while.’

We can begin to see already, from The Boys own accounts, that whilst the purpose of prison is to deprive an offender of his liberty as a punishment, the reality is that prison carries with it many damaging, long-term hidden costs, many of which are psychological and emotional.

Another theme from the data hinged upon further challenges of finding employment. The Boys for a number of reasons struggled to find work as we discuss in this section. One reason was because of their criminal records, discussed later, another reason was because The Boys felt that Bradford had very few employment opportunities. It is well documented that unemployment has affected Bradford's Pakistani population more than those from white or from other ethnicities (Alam and Husband 2006) and we saw earlier that this is a national issue. In the area studied, the Pakistani group have struggled with unemployment ever since the closure of the textile mills which they were heavily dependent on. The Boys felt frustrated that the city was failing to attract large businesses, they would frequently talk of how Bradford had very little when compared to neighbouring Leeds. One afternoon Tanny, clearly irritated with the bleak situation in Bradford, was telling The Boys that he was contemplating moving away,

“There's no money left here. All the big companies have left, and Bradford has just got smaller and smaller and Leeds has got bigger and bigger. Look at Westfield shopping centre [begun but abandoned at the time] - it's been left abandoned for years; no one gives a shit. You just got people here who don't care, but who like to make out they do.”

In one sense Tanny can be seen as a peripheral character amongst The Boys, yet at the same time the sentiment he expressed here was widely held by them. Interestingly, it was noted

that people of all generations throughout the neighbourhood expressed the same or similar views. It could be argued that it was felt with more intensity by The Boys because they felt more constrained to remain within Bradford for family reasons in comparison with other people of a similar age group in other communities.

Meanwhile a further explanation offered why The Boys struggled with finding employment was because they were uneducated and had no real qualifications. Mehmood hoped that by finding work he could provide for his children but felt that because of his lack of qualifications he would never secure a job, 'There's no jobs for people like me who have not even a GCSE, I've given up trying. Bro' I've been trying to get a job for ages now but nothing out there.'

However, according to Afzal education was not always the answer to finding a decent job, giving the example of so many people they knew with degrees who were working in degrading jobs. Realising that they had criminal records and very few qualifications did not, however, mean that The Boys sought to try and educate themselves by returning to college or any other form of education provider. Many of them could see little benefit from returning to college, particularly at their age. The Boys' view on education was that it was something one does when younger, not when they are in their mid to late twenties. This was to become apparent when one evening whilst the researcher was hanging out with the group, some of The Boys spoke of wanting to find work. According to them they had looked everywhere and had so far had no luck. Hoping to try and help them, the researcher suggested that it may be a good idea if they tried to gain some qualifications, for example, learn practical skills which could lead to an apprenticeship. However, on hearing what he had to say, Afzal replied somewhat bluntly:

'It's not our age to study now, plus all of this education don't get you nowhere. You tell me, how's it gonna help? Look at [naming a few people living in the neighbourhood], they got like proper education, I mean they got degrees and that, and they working in shitty job.'

One particular job that several of The Boys appeared to like the idea of was taxi-driving. This was also a popular method of earning a livelihood for a considerable number of residents living in the neighbourhood. The thought of working in a job which was flexible so that they could pick the days and hours they worked was appealing to them. However, given that The Boys had criminal records, the likelihood of them becoming taxi drivers was in reality very slim.

Meanwhile, even when they did eventually find jobs, it proved difficult for The Boys to hold onto these jobs. Zahir had finally found a job. The job was in a popular high street store, and Zahir was overjoyed, having been looking for a job for a while. A legal job now meant that he could make money without having to look over his shoulder to see if the police were checking whether he was selling cannabis. However, the job did not go as smoothly as he had hoped. One evening after finishing work Zahir seemed rather annoyed. He was not his usual amiable self, and when asked by some of the others what was wrong, he replied:

'It's the fucking boss he has pissed me off, he's always trying to give me a hard time, if he tries sacking me, I'd swear I'll fuck him up. It wasn't the apna [Pakistani] manager, it's the other one. He thinks he's something special. I said to him, don't think your something 'cuz you ain't, you're only a manager in the shop. You're not a manager out on the street. If you think you are, then come outside and speak to me like that, so he just shut up.'

A few days later Zahir was sacked from the job and was back to being unemployed. Given the fact that The Boys were mostly unemployed, there was still a need for them to raise money. This was not merely a matter of finding a source of revenue for themselves, but in some cases also a matter of providing for their families. In the case of some of them, they were dependent on state welfare, in particular on Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), although this was stigmatised and damaging to street credibility, so those who depended on it were unlikely to admit it readily.

In contrast to not having any formal education, a further explanation that made finding legal employment difficult in the eyes of The Boys was because of their criminal records. Ahmed appeared frustrated a number of times, having searched for work but finding that it was difficult for him to secure a position. Ahmed was convinced that it was his criminal record that stood in his way, he felt that employers did not want to employ someone who had a lengthy record like his,

'I can't find work because I've got a record. So what am I supposed to do? I want a job, hands on, something like car mechanics, or maybe electrics, anything hands on. I'm not a book person. But there's nothing to get. And now I am banned from driving it's hard to go anywhere to take a course.'

Evidently, having a criminal record, as has been mentioned by Bushway (2011), makes finding employment difficult for ex-offenders, as crime decreases the chances to find work, experience job stability and have good earnings (Sampson and Laub 1993; Bushway 2011; Pager 2003), thus highlighting the argument that people who engage in crime and who have had contact with the criminal justice system are labelled as deviant (Becker 1963), making life difficult for them in future. This was the case for those of The Boys searching for employment who found that having a criminal record was now a barrier for finding employment. One day at the gym Salman explained how there was one particular occasion when he was blatantly turned away from a job because of his criminal record,

'In one of the interviews I thought that I might get the job until the bastards asked me about my criminal record, and I had to be open with them 'cuz they do CRB checks on ya everywhere now. I told them that I had been to prison but that I ain't been in trouble with the law for over two years now, but the fuckers wrote to me a few days later saying: I'm sorry you ain't successful. I know what the bastards were thinking when I told them about my criminal record. I could see the way they were looking at me, like if I'm a proper crook or something.'

For some of The Boys, not being able to find work was used as an excuse for continuing to pursue a career selling illegal drugs. Ahmed explained on another occasion that, because he



had been struggling to find work, he was finding it difficult to refrain from getting involved with drugs.

It is important to highlight here that it seemed, in the case of The Boys, that prison did not reduce offending. If anything, it was seen by them as a hindrance to their offending, and they would come out only to continue to do what they were doing before they went inside. Some of The Boys were eager to make more money on release from prison, keen to catch up on the time they had lost inside. Zahir, upon his release, returned to selling drugs,

‘There’s not a lot for me to do now that I’m out. I’m trying not to get back into hustling but it’s harder now. What else can I do to make paper? I have made a few good links in there [prison] and I can get my hands on bagging shit now, so I will wait and see what I do. In the meantime, I’m just gonna chill and enjoy myself.’

Time spent inside did, however, make it difficult for some of The Boys to get back in the drugs market as other dealers were quick to take their clientele, but contacts made inside with other inmates could, in some cases, make it more profitable selling drugs upon release. Some of The Boys spoke of making ‘good links inside’, and were able to buy drugs cheaper than they had previously.

Incarceration however, often came at considerable personal cost for some of The Boys, recalling bad memories such as the loss of a family member or close friend. Research has highlighted how young people involved in offending experience parental, multiple and traumatic deaths at a higher frequency than in the general population (Vaswani, 2008). Nav was one who experienced bereavement whilst he was in prison, but, unlike the others who had lost friends and extended family members, it was Nav’s father who had unexpectedly died whilst he was inside. The death of his father was something that Nav found extremely upsetting, and he would occasionally, whilst hanging out, talk about it to The Boys. One evening as the group were sat in a car, Nav spoke of how he felt when he first learnt about his father’s death when he was in prison,

‘I couldn’t believe it, I was in shock, I jus wanted to be there for my mum and brothers but I couldn’t. Them days were tough for me, I felt like I could kill someone that’s how angry I used to be. All I used to think about was my dad and how hard he worked to make life easy for us. I was, like, proper down for ages.’

Nav was allowed to attend his father’s funeral prayer and, whilst he was grateful he could attend, this left him feeling embarrassed for his family as he was accompanied into the mosque by two prison officers,

‘Me cousins, especially my uncles - I know they didn’t like me, they were there in the masjid, they were, like, looking at me. I knew what they were thinking, they were, like, he’s not there for his family when they need him. But then I didn’t say anything because there were loads of people in there, it was rammed. It was hard. I felt that I had stressed my dad out because of getting locked up and that.’

Often major family events would occur from which The Boys were excluded, and no compassionate discretion was given to allow prisoners to attend the funerals of close



relatives without the presence of prison guards. This was especially important to The Boys when the funeral was that of a parent and was held in the mosque in view of all those present. There was also a feeling, as Nav mentions, of him having let the family down for not being there when they were going through such a difficult time. This is a particularly interesting point because, despite The Boys not being prepared to show anyone that prison was testing at times, they would speak of prison as not allowing them to be able to support their families during tough times.

### **Theoretical discussion: A political economy approach to prisoner re-entry**

Leaving the fieldwork data aside for the moment, which should serve from The Boys own accounts as eloquent witness to the challenges and dilemmas of prison re-entry among the group of British Pakistani young men participating in the study, we now turn towards our theory and interpretation of the data. The ethnographer, as well as rendering thick descriptions of events, experiences and their meaning to participants, has a duty to further social science knowledge and analysis, to better understand rather than merely delineate and describe social phenomena. Perhaps even to think through the implications of research knowledge for policy and practice. On that basis we are entitled to ask whether, for example, Miller (2014) is correct in his somewhat grand conclusion from his ethnographic study of a prisoner re-entry program in the United States, that these programmes are little more than a collusion between social welfare and criminal justice state institutions to manage urban poverty among marginalized populations. And as such alter the scope, reach and consequence of these programs in the lives of the urban poor. After all there is something of this lethargy and marked lack of enthusiasm to actually rehabilitate ex-prisoners found in the bleak accounts so far. Not one of the study participants throughout the four-year period of the study mentioned receiving any practical interest or support from any agency that might have purportedly been tasked to support prisoner re-entry.

We cannot but help agree with Melossi (2015) – who revisits and updates one of the key ideas of his classic *The Prison and the Factory: Origins of the Penitentiary System* – that migrants' exploitability as labourers is also strengthened through the threat and reality of captivity in prison. Thinking about the intergenerational origins of British Pakistani migrants, as a former peasant class, and of their dependents, their penal disciplining could be understood in part as attempting to forcefully transform them into an obedient working class, while they for their part, refuse poor work. We jump to this somewhat startling general thesis as a way of explaining The Boy's often troubled and difficult re-entry experiences according to the underlying purposes and functions of punishment from the point of view of a political economy perspective (Rusche and Kirchheimer 2009 [1939], Melossi and Pavarini 1981, De Giorgi 2006, Phillips 2012, Melossi 2015).

The *modus operandi* of The Boys survival and activity was their participation in local drug markets. Release from prison and re-entry to their neighbourhood meant that they faced certain unavoidable economic and cultural imperatives that underlay their difficulties. As such, their individual experiences of being released and returned to prison can be firmly placed within social and economic relationships found outside the prison. The Boys were only too aware of the disappearance of the relatively unskilled woollen textile work they might normally have entered. They knew this because their fathers had told them. Although by no means straightforward, the links identified by Rusche (1933) between

penal sanction supplements, ancillary to failed labour markets, and Wacquant's (2009) extension of this to the place of 'the ghetto', to ethnicity and to poverty, are plausible. At least when penal institutions can be viewed in their interrelationship with other institutions and with non-penal aspects of social policy, within a wider strategy of controlling the poor (Garland, 1986). The challenges then that the men faced in our study, from trying to resettle back into their communities, to trying to find work and refraining from post prison offending, requires this sort of contextualisation.

Stating our argument baldly, for the young men studied here, fluctuations over their lifetimes in the demand for (unskilled) labour among their ethnic group creates conditions of life and standards of living whereby economic necessity, in many cases, trumps moral affiliation, and criminality can become a means of economic survival. Consequently, policing and penal sanctions are required to ensure that individuals are unable to sustain a living by criminal means and are deterred from tempting to try. If from the perspective we've chosen, to contextualise the young men's accounts and experiences, their prison experiences are coercive ancillaries to the labour market, which they reject its offer of poor work, then prison is meant to create conditions of life markedly more unpleasant than those experienced by those among their peers readier to accept poor work.

These pains of imprisonment serve to treat these young men according to the public sense of the real harms they trade, particularly the symbolic messages sent to the law-abiding public, widely supported within their marginalized milieu. For us however, their struggle on release from prison to maintain healthy family relationships, find suitable work and refrain from further offending, continued to be decisive whether the cycle of release and return was broken or compounded by social and economic relations beyond theirs and the public's control.

Wacquant's (2001b) *Prisons of Poverty* thesis argues that the prison system grows to manage economic marginalisation and the withdrawal of welfare at the bottom of the class structure, and that harsher police and prison practices and measures adopted today are a direct result of the weakening or unavailability of decent jobs, consequently managed by growing state authority. Unemployment, precarious and poor work, adverse labour market conditions, especially weigh upon working class, Muslim and Black younger and older uneducated, unskilled men. Ultimately – perhaps as a 'last resort' – punitive welfare regulation becomes supplemented by incarceration, in the context of a general state of 'social insecurity'.

Some of these theoretical observations follow from our study and what The Boys told us, albeit indirectly and implicitly. We were however somewhat impressed by the current bleakness of The Boys position in British society and the seeming indifference towards that condition by authority, except to discipline those who 'refuse' poor, precarious and low status work; especially those considered superfluous to changes in the demand for labour. In neutralising and warehousing the most disruptive and harmful elements, state authority is affirmed and repressive penal and welfare policies are legitimised. For us, 'problem' or 'surplus' populations are bound to risk imprisonment if their life chances and employment options lack improvement due to policy indifference.

As Wacquant (2001a) argues in another context, these 'dispossessed and dishonoured' young men are 'entrapped' in a 'deadly symbiosis' between prison and ghetto, while rejected by the deregulated labour market. The growth in the male British Muslim

population – connected to the growth of drug offences – makes it likely that The Boys will continue to be caught up in the penalization of the ‘Muslim question’ in Britain. A question of the chronic economic marginalization and isolation of this young ethnic group.

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